

Work on key Loop 101 connector to start in fall

by **Cecilia Chan** - Jun. 2, 2008
The Arizona Republic

Construction of a roadway to give drivers in north central Peoria additional access to Loop 101 will begin this fall.

More than 50 residents attended an open house last week to hear a presentation on the Beardsley Road connector project, which is expected to relieve traffic on such major streets as 75th avenue and Union Hills Drive.

The project calls for extending Beardsley Road from 81st Avenue over New River to a southbound frontage road from 75th Avenue to Union Hills Drive. A "Texas U-Turn" - style bridge - the first in the state - will be built over Loop 101 north of Union Hills Drive, allowing frontage-road traffic to access the northbound lanes of Loop 101 without have to go through the Union Hills signalized intersection.

The widening of the Union Hills Drive bridge over Loop 101 also is to begin later this winter, to relieve congestion. The widening will have three lanes in each direction, with dual left-turn lanes onto Loop 101 in each direction. A sidewalk also will be built on both sides of the bridge.

Chris Kmetty, Peoria project manager, said the anticipated date of completion is spring 2010.

Westbrook Village resident Marcia Stander, who viewed the project designs on display, said her only concern was the disruption of traffic during construction.

"We are on the corner of a lot of this stuff," said Stander, who lives in an adult community. "When they widen the bridge, there'll be a lot of headaches. But when it's done, it's going to be great."

Ventana Lakes resident Carol Ruikka sees the Beardsley Road connector project as something good for Peoria.

"There's so much traffic, they have to do something," she said at the open house on the project.

A 2002 traffic study showed a need for additional access to Loop 101 from Beardsley Road to relieve peak-hour congestion at the 75th Avenue and Union Hills interchanges, which are used by many Northwest Valley drivers to get onto Loop 101.

Ruikka, a real estate agent, said her concern is the construction of a roundabout at Beardsley Road and 81st Avenue.

"The whole problem is we are not used to it," she said. "Nobody likes change."

Others at the meeting also expressed concerns with the traffic-control roundabout, wondering whether it would hinder drivers and pose safety problems.

Chris Kmetty, Peoria project manager, said the use of a roundabout is partly to address the concerns of nearby Fletcher Height residents about cut-through traffic on 81st Avenue.

Mainly, the roundabout is a better tool to improve traffic flow as compared with using traffic signals, he said.

"Roundabouts operate with a continuous flow of traffic," he said.

Kmetty added that follow-up studies by the [Arizona](#) Department of Transportation and other agencies found that roundabouts reduce crashes by 90 percent, because traffic speed is reduced to 15 mph. He said the consultant who designed Peoria's modern roundabout, which will have traffic-calming devices built in, has done more than 100 such projects nationwide.

Kmetty said the much safer modern roundabouts are not like the fast-traveling traffic circles seen in some East Coast cities.

Westbrook Village resident Barry Bischoff, who bikes along 81st Avenue twice a week, questioned if he would be able to continue biking on the roadway with the roundabout in place.

Kmetty said pedestrians can cross the roundabout, which will have crosswalks, much like they would negotiate a parking lot, where traffic speed is 10 to 15 mph. He said roundabouts create gaps as traffic slows, allowing pedestrians to get through.

The Beardsley project also includes slightly relocating the southbound entrance ramp at 75th Avenue and the westbound exit ramp at Union Hills to improve traffic flow.

In addition, Union Hills will be widened at the Loop 101 interchange; Beardsley will be widened between 83rd and 81st avenues; Lake Pleasant Parkway will be widened north of Beardsley; and a raised median will be constructed on 83rd Avenue south of Beardsley.

Another related project includes the widening of the Union Hills bridge over Loop 101, an ADOT project. The widening will involve three lanes in each direction, with dual left-turn lanes and a sidewalk on both sides of the bridge.

The cost for the Union Hills and Beardsley projects is about \$45 million, paid mainly by general obligation funds. However, the city will be reimbursed a large portion of the cost from the Maricopa County Regional Transportation Plan, funded by Proposition 400 monies. Voters in 2004 approved extending a one-half cent sales tax for 20 years for transportation projects.

Kmetty said Peoria will receive \$22 million in fiscal years 2011 and 2012 for the Beardsley connection. The city also secured a \$10 million loan for the Union Hills interchange widening. The loan will be repaid in 2012, when the project becomes fully funded in the Regional Transportation Plan.

Peoria applied for the loan so it can move up the Union Hills widening by three years to the same time schedule as the Beardsley project to minimize traffic disruption.

Other jurisdictions involved in the project include ADOT and the city of Glendale.

For more information, on the project go online to www.peoriaaz.gov and click on the Engineering Department's Building Peoria area.